

**IRS UNVEILS TOLL-FREE NUMBER,
PREPARES FOR PROBLEM SOLVING DAY
IN NEW ROUND OF TAXPAYER HELP**

WASHINGTON -- The Internal Revenue Service started a new round of taxpayer help Thursday by unveiling a new toll-free telephone number designed for people with long-standing tax problems.

The new hotline for help -- 877-777-4778 -- will be available for taxpayers who haven't been able to promptly resolve problems through normal IRS channels. Callers will reach trouble-shooters at the Taxpayer Advocate's Problem Resolution Program. For routine questions, taxpayers should continue using the primary IRS information number at 800-829-1040.

"If people have unresolved problems, this new number will be the place they can count on for help," National Taxpayer Advocate Val Oveson said.

The start of the new toll-free number coincides with Saturday's national Problem Solving Day, another project being spearheaded by the Taxpayer Advocate's office. At 40 locations around the country, IRS experts will gather for face-to-face meetings with taxpayers to sort through tax problems.

"We want it to be easier for taxpayers to cut through the red tape," Oveson said. "We're here to help, whether it's on the phone or in person."

"Taxpayers should be able to iron out their problems with the IRS sooner, not later," said Charles Rossotti, Commissioner of Internal Revenue. "This new toll-free number and national Problem Solving Day form key pieces in our mission to improve taxpayer service."

The new telephone number and Problem Solving Day are among the programs being supervised by a strengthened Taxpayer Advocate's office, which received new powers under the IRS restructuring bill approved this year by Congress and President Clinton. Oveson, who became Taxpayer Advocate in September, said his office will be an independent voice inside the IRS that champions the rights of taxpayers.

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An early move by Oveson's office is creating a second step in the agency's toll-free telephone system designed to handle hard-to-fix problems. In most cases, taxpayer problems can be solved with one call to the IRS general help number at 800-829-1040.

But if this first phone call -- or any other taxpayer contacts with the IRS -- fails to fix a problem, Oveson hopes a follow-up call to the new hotline at 877-777-4778 will take care of the remaining difficulties. People should call this new number if their initial attempts to resolve tax problems with the IRS have been unsuccessful or unanswered.

The call will put people in touch with the Problem Resolution Program. A personal taxpayer advocate will be assigned to each person to help clear up problems and ensure each case is given a complete, impartial review.

"We have people trained to handle these problems as quickly and as effectively as possible," Oveson said. "If taxpayers have difficulties, we have a system in place to help."

Many of the problems can be settled with one phone call. If not, callers are sent to the appropriate office, and their taxpayer advocates will track the progress of their cases.

The new toll-free number will be available 16 hours a day (7 a.m.-11 p.m. ET), Monday through Saturday in November and December before expanding to 24-hour service in January for the start of tax-filing season. Similar around-the-clock service will be available next year for the main IRS help line.

Calls to the new number will be handled primarily by IRS centers in Pittsburgh and Richmond, Va., with assistance from Atlanta and Fresno, Calif.

Following last year's congressional hearings, IRS leaders decided to make the Problem Solving Program more accessible and visible to taxpayers. Creating the new toll-free number is part of that effort.

The addition of 877-777-4778 will be displayed prominently in upcoming tax publications during the 1998 filing season.

"This new number will give people a direct pipeline to a place where they can get help," Oveson said.

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MORE HELP DURING SATURDAY'S NATIONAL PROBLEM SOLVING DAY

Besides the new telephone number, the Taxpayer Advocate's office is putting the finishing touches on Saturday's national Problem Solving Day, which will be held at 40 locations across the country. The special weekend session takes place a year after the IRS embarked on the program, which has helped resolve more than 30,000 taxpayer problems.

Taxpayers will meet one-on-one with IRS experts. The set-up allows many taxpayer problems to be worked out quickly because IRS administrators and specialists gather in the same room to tackle the same questions. In some situations, issues that can take weeks to resolve can be fixed in one meeting.

"Problem Solving Day makes it easier for taxpayers to work things out," Oveson said. "We'll have the right people available with the ability and the expertise to get things done."

Taxpayers interested in attending are encouraged to make reservations by calling their local IRS office or the national toll-free number at 800-829-1040. Just placing the call to the IRS can frequently clear up the question, making it unnecessary to visit Problem Solving Day.

In future months, the IRS will host Problem Solving Days in other cities and states.

SATURDAY'S PROBLEM SOLVING DAY CITIES

State/City/Telephone Number

Alaska

Anchorage (800) 829-1040.

Arizona

Phoenix (602) 207-8635.

California

Laguna Niguel (949) 360-2178.

Los Angeles (213) 894-8852

Sacramento (510) 637-4359.

San Jose (408) 494-8285.

Colorado

Denver (303) 571-4402.

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Connecticut

Hartford (860) 240-4156.

Florida

Fort Lauderdale (954) 423-7684.

Maitland (904) 232-1542.

Georgia

Atlanta (404) 331-3485.

Hawaii

Honolulu (800) 829-1040.

Illinois

Chicago (312) 886-0550.

Indiana

Indianapolis (317) 226-5081.

Louisiana

New Orleans (504) 558-3019.

Maryland

Baltimore (410) 962-9337.

Massachusetts

Boston (617) 565-1550.

Michigan

Detroit (313) 628-3670.

Minnesota

St. Paul (651) 290-3061.

Missouri

Chesterfield (314) 539-6900.

New Jersey

Cherry Hill (973) 921-4377.

Paterson (973) 921-4377.

New York

Brooklyn (718) 488-3601.

Buffalo (716) 551-4574.

Manhattan (212) 436-1013.

North Carolina

Greensboro (336) 378-2334.

Ohio

Akron (513) 684-3094.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma City (405) 297-4745.

Oregon

Portland (503) 326-3295.

(more)

Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh (412) 281-0281.

Rhode Island

Providence (401) 528-4317.

Tennessee

Nashville (615) 736-5423.

Texas

Austin (512) 499-5000.

Farmers Branch (972) 308-1019.

Fort Worth (817) 978-3477.

Houston (713) 209-4506.

Virginia

Richmond (804) 771-2292.

Washington

Kennewick (800) 829-1040.

West Virginia

Charleston (804) 771-2292.

Wisconsin

Milwaukee (414) 297-1260.

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